

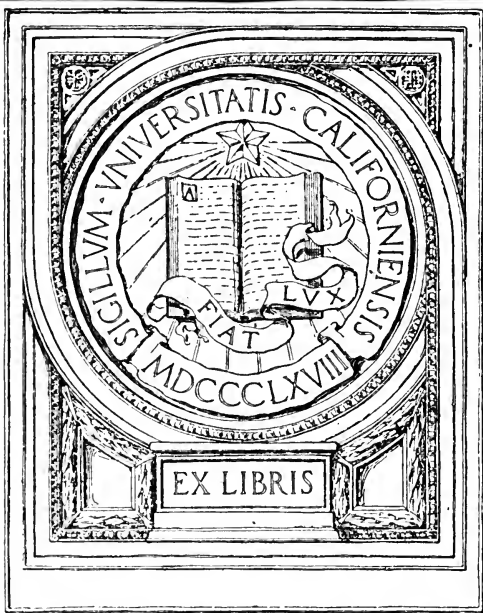
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THE REPERTORY THEATRE IDEA

By FRANCES JEWETT



How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

— *Shakespeare*

TO THE
ANTHROPOLOGICAL

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The Repertory Theatre Idea

Three Addresses by MRS. JEWETT
GIVEN BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF THE
FRANCES JEWETT REPERTORY THEATRE CLUB
at the meetings of March 3, 1920, March 2, 1921
January 4, 1922



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TO THE
ANNALS OF

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By
FRANCES H. JEWETT

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THE HEALTH OF THE THEATRE*



ADDRESS AT THE
MONTHLY MEETING OF THE CLUB
MARCH 3, 1920



GREETINGS to this Club and gratitude to its members for all that they have done and are doing to help this Repertory Theatre idea.

As I stand here with this audience facing me, I am reminded of words spoken to me over twenty-five years ago when I was crossing the Pacific Ocean on my way from Australia to America, words that have since

(*The title of this address was taken from a letter which was written by Mr. John Drinkwater to Mrs. John C. Abbot, President of the Frances Jewett Repertory Theatre Club and read at the club meeting on February 4th, 1920. In this letter Mr. Drinkwater wrote "... it is only through such ventures that any health can return to the theatre, and I am sure, moreover, that every such effort reacts definitely upon the whole range of theatrical enterprise.")

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become to me as a prophecy fulfilled. An American woman, sailing on the same boat, returning to her own country, said these words to me: "You will not be lonely in America, you will love it, and Americans will love you. I see their faces turning towards you, especially I see the faces of the American women turning to you." This may have been said merely to comfort a young and lonely woman leaving her home and country for the first time and going to a strange land and a strange people, though thank God, not speaking a strange language. However that may be, her words have come true, or I would not be standing here today in the presence of this Club, formed by seven women who did me the honor to call it by my name. And America is no longer a strange country to me. It has become my country and her people my people.

The Repertory Theatre is essentially the democracy of the theatrical world. In it every man and woman has equal and ample opportunity, the talented to fully exercise their ability, the weak to develop theirs. The idea, however, did not at first make

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its direct appeal to me, but to my husband, and it was in listening to him talk of its value to his profession and to the public that I began to see for myself its far-reaching influence and possibilities for good, and as these possibilities unfolded more and more to my thought the call for definite action became more and more imperative, until finally it was I who pleaded and urged that he start this Repertory Theatre in Boston and put his theories into practice. Indeed, it was my hand that pushed his boat from the shore to meet the troubled waters that always await the launching of a more advanced idea—but, womanlike, having done so, I jumped on board with him and we have sailed many stormy seas together.

I do not grudge the struggles and the sufferings we have passed through since that first step was taken, for the goal is a high one, this Repertory Theatre idea, which is to restore the health of the theatre. The work is well started, and in the future it will rest largely with this Club to carry it on. The torch which we have lighted we are already prepared to fling to you.

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May you and yours carry it high and clear for others to see and follow. May you one and all, in the best sense of the words, "Carry on, carry on, carry on!"

THE HIGHER AIM OF THE THEATRE



ADDRESS AT THE
MONTHLY MEETING OF THE CLUB
MARCH 2, 1921



I AM glad to have the opportunity of speaking a few words to you this afternoon. It is just a year ago since I stood here and asked you to help "carry on" and up the higher idealism of the Repertory Theatre, and I want to thank each and every worker who has done so. During the past year many steps have been taken on and up, and there have been many developments. The latest, it appears that the little house which has for several years sheltered this repertory idea is to be swept aside by the march of events and we are faced with the problem either that Boston must lose this repertory idea, or that we must build it a new and more adequate house. That Boston should lose the idea seems inconceivable, and

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that we should build a theatre at this time raises a very grave question. Why? At a time when the world is suffering from the effects of a great and disastrous war, the consequences being manifested in sorrow, disease and famine, why should we give our time, our thought and our money to build a theatre? I am answering myself and I will answer you by one magic word—Education. Certainly we should stretch out our hand to comfort the sorrowing and the diseased. But we have yet another hand and that surely should be stretched out to uphold and further education and enlightenment for the race. Education is the watchword of every true democracy, and education, like most other things in this age, has burst its bonds, has swept on through the schools, passed the schools. It has been incorporated in the business world, into the sport world, into almost every avenue of life. It has called each and every art to its aid, and last of all it is calling the theatre and the theatre is answering like “an army with banners”—the theatre with its light and its shade, its laughter and its tears, the

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theatre with its wide open doors through which the millions pour day by day and night by night, with its great roll of drama through which many of our greatest geniuses have appealed to universal humanity, pre-eminently our own immortal Shakespeare,—the theatre which of all the arts holds up the mirror wherein humanity loves to see itself. Matthew Arnold truly cried, “The theatre is irresistible, organize the theatre!”

Thus the theatre is a great factor in our midst. It is either to be a great blessing or a bane to our race. And what are we going to do about it? The flame of the higher idealism for the theatre has been already kindled here in Boston. It flickered up, at first a feeble flame, sometimes almost lost in the struggles of its pioneers and often almost quenched by their tears, but it has lived on and it is burning now a steady flame.

I am not here to beg, but I am here to invite you to nourish and feed this flame, to fan it so that it may become a beacon light to show to the world what the theatre in its higher mission can do for the race,

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not only for our own generation but for generations yet to come.

I thank you for all the good you have done, for all the good you are going to do, and again I invite you to "carry on."

THE POWER OF THE SPOKEN WORD IN THE THEATRE



ADDRESS AT THE
MONTHLY MEETING OF THE CLUB
JANUARY 4, 1922



MR. SHAW, in his preface to the little play "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets," which is to be given here this afternoon, states that he originally wrote the play to aid a fund to build a National Theatre in England. He adds, rather sadly, that the project failed—in England, because so many people failed to see the necessity of such a theatre in order that the people might have a National soul. He goes on to speak, through the characters of this play, of the power of the spoken word and of the glory that may be revealed through lovely words. Finally he quotes from that great Word—the Book of Books—and I very reverently repeat: "In the

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beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." We know that the theatre has been chosen by many great writers as an avenue for their genius, realizing the power of the spoken word to reach the people, and yet in this day, as never before in history, in thousands of theatres in this and other lands the spoken word is banished; that wonderful instrument, the human voice, is silent, we see only a passing show. Think what it would be if we had such a world, speechless, voiceless—a dumb universe. The greatest group of nations on earth today is united by one common tie; it is not the tie of blood, it is much stronger than blood, it is the tie of language, the English language. We are often severely criticised, among other things, in connection with our work in this theatre, for confining ourselves—so it is said, to English plays acted by English players. I would like to say here, we do not confine ourselves to anything. On the contrary, we are unfolding, adding a new chapter in the

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evolution of dramatic art in America. Is it not entirely logical that in this vast country with its innumerable theatres, and in this historic city of Boston, there should be at least one theatre offering a welcome and a home for the works of thinkers and writers whose thoughts, training and methods were obtained in the atmosphere where the language was evolved, and for players whose training and voices were also "made in England?" Is it not cause rather for gratitude than for censure, that there is a theatre where American dramatists, poets, students, actors and public have the opportunity to come and study these methods direct from the land and race that mothered our words and speech? I think so. We have tried, however feebly, in this little house to give out beautiful words thoughtfully and adequately expressed, and I trust that this work will be carried on until its horizon deepens, broadens and glows, until it becomes boundless! Art is always untrammelled, never local, never personal, therefore always beautiful, and, thank God, always universal.

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I hope that some day you will build a home here in Boston, where lovelier and lovelier words may be given out to feed the hungry heart of the people, to the end that in this great land, indeed, the National soul may live.



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